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ABSTRACT

Journalism is a profession, and the academic preparation for it whould be emulative of professional schools such as medicine and law rather than of liberal arts colleges. The purpose of education for journalism should be to produce the best possible newsgatherers, that is, reporters. In addition to preparing students in the basics of journalism, the journalism curriculum should take cognizance of the social sciences with the objective of correlating the instruction in the social sciences with journalism courses. The journalism student should be taught to conduct secondary and primary research, making limited use of the hypothesis approach. Teachers and students should become better acquainted through reduced class sizes, allowing closer attention to individual student's needs; and curriculum designers should increase the number of journalism courses while reducing liberal arts requirements. (Teaching techniques aimed at developing the skills and qualities necessary to produce first-rate reporting are included). (RB)

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NOTE: The attached work of Dr. Curtis MacDougall is an example of the kind of essay on journalism teaching that we hope to generate as part of an accumulative study on journalism teaching. It is the committee's hope that such essays written from divergent points of view will be helpful to all of us as we examine our own teaching philosophies.

Since one of the committee's objectives was to stir some thought about journalism teaching, it was perfectly logical to ask Dr. MacDougall to stir with his considerable paddle.

The committee is grateful for his efforts and will welcome responding essays in the future.

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What Journalism Education Should Be All About

by

Curtis D. MacDougall

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Journalism is a profession and the academic preparation for it should be emulative of professional schools such as medicine and law rather than of liberal arts colleges. For more than a half century journalism education has fallen short of what it should be because this has not been the case. It took a quarter century to win separate department status for journalism on most campuses. However, the autonomy enjoyed by separate colleges or schools has yet to be achieved except in a few exceptional cases which, incidentally, led to the best episodes in the history of education for journalism. Long freed from being just a part of English departments, journalism courses and curricula today are being swallowed up by colleges and schools of communications, most of whose directors are more ignorant of and/or less sympathetic toward journalism than was true of the English professors who were the principal bottlenecks before World War II.

The young person ambitious to become a journalist should be able to enroll in a journalism school and place himself (or herself; or is it personself) confidently in the hands of a qualified faculty capable of giving him or her his or her money's worth. Every journalism graduate should bear an invisible guaranteed stamp recommending him or her to any future employer and to the public to whose best interests he or she has chosen to dedicate his or her life.

Obviously a journalism curriculum must be carefully structured. It must provide step-by-step exercises (drill) which the student must master to achieve his or her goal, just as a piano pupil under proper instruction does progressively more difficult finger exercises, scales and simple pieces. The piano student wants to be as skilled as professional practitioners are observed to be. The pupil expects music teachers to know what emphasis should be placed on what aspects of the learner's training at various stages of development. The journalism student should be handled in the same way. The journalism student's entire training, that is, should be planned as a continuous relayed experience, not as an opportunity to meet all-campus standards by acquiring credits in a specified number of unrelated courses. Journalism cannot be taught effectively as a mere major within a liberal arts college which presumably provides a versatile life view for students with no definite occupational goal in mind. The liberal arts graduate says, "I'm a bachelor of arts. Good for me. Now what? I have no skill," and possibly goes looking for a graduate school so as to prepare himself for breadwinning. The journalism graduate who is merely a liberal arts graduate with a major in his chosen field supposedly is ready to become a practicing journalist although his preparation has been mostly non-vocational, to use broad and not accurately descriptive terms.

Execution of a vocationally motivated curriculum is dependent upon the highly qualified journalism faculty that knows what the finished product should be like. The standards of excellence must conform to the best known levels of competence essential for success

in the journalistic world. More important, the qualified faculty must be aware of the informational needs of the democratic society which the student is being prepared to serve. Obviously there invariably will be differences of opinion as to what standards should be maintained, but there should be no disagreement regarding the objectives. Unless a journalism curriculum is predicated on the promotion of service to future journalistic employes and employers and to the self governing public, it has no excuse for being. And this doesn't mean the journalism school should be a trade school. Quite the contrary. What it means is that trying to squeeze a journalism major into the standard liberal arts curriculum is unworkable and proof can be found on campuses and in newsrooms from coast to coast. That's the way we've been doing it and it's no good.

A journalism dean, director, chairman or whatever he is called is handicapped in the proper performance of his most important role, that of educator, if he is bogged down with committee assignments and other activities. The risk that such occur is much greater when journalism is a mere unit in some larger division. To meet general requirements of a liberal arts or other division, furthermore, the journalism head to be effective must learn to be constructively hypocritical. As a result the course headings in a journalism curriculum list may be misleading. To meet the general requirements perhaps it is necessary to have seminars with fancy scholarly titles. It then is up to the faculty to sabotage such courses so as to make them valuable to students. Elimination of the straight jacket by conferring independence on journalism should at least encourage greater honesty

and reduce confusion and/or despair on the part of catalogue reading journalistic aspirants.

To repeat, considerable differences can exist as to curriculum specifics--how the total package should be presented--but it is impossible to ignore the basic fact that journalism is a synonym for fact finding-reporting. That's what journalism is all about, newsgathering, so the purpose of education for journalism should be to produce the best possible newsgatherers, reporters. Journalists are the eyes and ears of the public as a whole. They have a tremendous responsibility. They must find out what is happening; they must report those happenings accurately and thoroughly, and they must provide meaning, interpretation and judgment thereon. Different journalists specialize in various aspects of this total function and there is a continuous dispute as to where the divisions of labor should be drawn. All of this, however, is secondary to the fact that it is the reporting function which is paramount, the means of communication being of technical interest but of decidedly minor importance in the training of a newsgatherer. Anyone who believes differently has no business trying to instruct future journalists.

Slave runners had no telephones, mailbags or wireless to which to conform. A comparatively short time ago most reporters wrote their stories in long hand, and it was difficult for some of the best of them to adjust to the typewriter. Today many different kinds of gadgets are being introduced into the newsroom and some of them involve changes in the way reporters compose their copy. They do not, however, alter the newsgathering function. No interviewing machine has as yet been invented. Wire recorders merely record. They do not

think up the questions that are asked. Journalism students must become familiar with the mechanical tools they may have to use, but journalism schools must not become trade schools with overemphasis on gadgetry. Such matters should be assigned only very small attention.

One of the most important functions of journalism education is to train interviewers to ask the right questions so as to get the best answers. That means command of the best newsgathering techniques, adequate factual subject matter knowledge and proper social perspective. No effective journalism curriculum can be built on the piecemeal free elective or cafeteria system which characterizes altogether too many liberal arts curricula today. When Kenneth E. Olson was setting up the five year Medill plan he consulted with numerous practicing newsmen. Together they listed what a well-rounded practicing journalist should know.

It was assumed, to begin with, that the journalism student would know how to use a typewriter and so courses in type previously offered were dropped to make way for more important matters. Thereafter it was the student's responsibility to acquire typing skill as only typewritten copy was acceptable. The same attitude was taken toward command of the English language, its grammar and spelling. Presumably the student had learned these fundamentals in high school. Anyway the journalism school was not going to provide instruction in what should already be known as tools of the trade.

In addition to the strictly journalistic tecnhique courses, the list of subjects which the college journalism student should take included United States and world history; principles of economics and, if possible, public finance, taxation and labor problems; principles

of sociology and, if possible, sociology courses in criminology, race relations, population problems and urban sociology. At that time concern over pollution and other ecological matters had not developed. Also principles of political science, including thorough knowledge of American state and local government; a general understanding of the nature of the physical and natural sciences, especially the effect of scientific advances of the past few centuries on human thought and institutions. In addition it was considered valuable for a journalism student to have courses in psychology, philosophy, anthropology and the fine arts. These were considered minimum requirements for a well equipped newsgatherer. Dean Olson and his advisors, academic as well as professional, came to the obvious conclusion that a minimum educational package could not be delivered in four years. It would take at least five related years. On the 25th anniversary of the Medill school, Olson predicted that the journalism curriculum would be expanded to six or seven years. And he did not mean the addition of graduate years different from the four undergraduate years. Rather, the recommendation was for one continuous course of five or more years. Today most journalism schools with graduate work unfortunately emphasize research or other activities sharply dividing undergraduate from graduate years, much that comes after the fourth year being only dimly related to the professional practice of journalism or the contribution a free press is supposed to make to a democratic society.

The trend in higher education today is unmistakably in the direction of more permissiveness, more electives. Some schools follow what is called the 4-4 plan. That is, all knowledge is split into equal parts, each carrying four hours course credit. It thus becomes

superfluous to count course credits. A student merely takes four courses a year for a total of 16 courses to qualify for a B.A. degree. In some places a few minimum requirements, as freshman English, continue to exist, but they are rapidly being reduced or eliminated, so it is already possible some places to take any 16 courses the student chooses, no matter how unrelated any two of them may be and to consider the end product an educated person. No matter what if any sense this makes for a liberal arts program, it makes no sense for a professional program such as journalism.

As much as possible the journalism curriculum should take cognizance of those in the social sciences with the object in mind of correlating the instruction in the social sciences with journalism courses. This requires considerable interdepartmental cooperation, often difficult or impossible to achieve. It is to be regretted that Joseph Pulitzer's original dream for a journalism school had to be abandoned as impractical. It envisioned a school of journalism as a completely independent educational institution, offering all of its own non-journalism subjects, an obvious impossibility. So, if it can be worked out, the reporting class in which students concentrate on police and courts--law and order--should be correlated with what the sociology professor is giving them in criminology classes or what they are perhaps learning in political science courses in constitutional law. Given the will for such cooperation, and the support of the top administrators, the way to achieve it unquestionably can be developed.

A journalism student should be taught to conduct research in a manner that will be valuable to an interviewer or fact finder. He or

she should be trained to write for publication. All through high school the student's research has been mostly and of necessity secondary. Term papers were based on information from encyclopedias and other reference books which it is, of course, important to know how to use. In college, however, the student's research should be increasingly firsthand as is true of journalistic fact finding. The student should continue to use reference books. In fact, knowledge of their existence and importance in a vast number of general and special fields is an important part of the journalism student's preparation. The journalism student should not, however, approach an assignment as does a social science graduate student who uses the hypothesis approach to truth seeking. That method consists of the statement of a problem and of a hypothesis as to what the answer is. This hypothesis is derived from analysis of the ideas of philosophers and other authorities, mostly of the past. "If," the reasoning goes, "what these great thinkers have said is true, then the following should be the case as regards our immediate problem." Then comes the mad rush to the files of the New York Times Index, even by some of journalism's most severe critics, and the so-called testing of the hypothesis. Comes the final chapter and the new scholar concludes: "Hypothesis proved. Grant me a degree. Call me doctor." It would be difficult to find a Ph.D. dissertation the last chapter of which says, "I was wrong. The hypothesis was phony."

Undergraduate students in the social sciences are trained in the type of thinking that leads to this kind of graduate research. The journalistic approach to knowledge is much sounder and professors of journalism should crusade to persuade their campus colleagues to

emulate it. Instead of imitating the social sciences approach journalism faculty members should drill future professional newsgatherers to investigate absolutely every possible avenue, with as open a mind as possible no matter what Aristotle or John Stuart Mill might think, exploring rumors and hunches and snooping in any and all places where the unexpected break might be discovered. After he has exhausted absolutely every possibility and only then does he organize and analyze his notes and postulate anything that would be the equivalent of a hypothesis. The journalist's conclusions are based on first hand fact finding, not vice versa.

All writing in journalism courses should be journalistic. Throughout the high school years the student composes so-called themes, a type of composition which has absolutely no counterpart in real life. If the drudgery has helped the student toward the proper use of English grammar and correct spelling, it was not wasted. In journalism courses, however, the student continues such drills and develops the powers of observation and description by composition courses in which personal experiences are the subject matter. Book reviews and criticisms should be composed as though they were to be published, currently. That means either makebelieve that the book has just come off the press or that the review is a second-look or an evaluation at some later date of whether the author was sound. "He called the shots," "We should have taken his advice," or "What mistakes he was responsible for inspiring!" are possible themes of such book reviews.

Let the journalism student write as for print about topics of interest encountered in political science, sociology and economics courses. There is quite a difference between composing a heavily-footnoted treatise on civil service for a social science course and composing a series of printable newspaper articles on the same subject. It is time wasted for the journalism student to keep practicing the techniques of the theme or term paper, which is the college level version of the high school theme. Maybe the journalism school student can't escape some such assignments in order to pass his non-journalism courses, but he certainly can be spared any more such time wasters in his journalism school classes. The traditional graduate thesis as a degree requirement has no place in a journalism curriculum. It merely exhausts time and energy on training with little or no value for the future journalist and it takes time and energy from drill in the type of research and writing for which the journalism student is paying to become proficient. It is easy to joke about the 5 w's but the fact remains the 5 w's are necessary for a complete news account and any experienced journalist knows that there are plenty of ways to prevent their becoming a literary straightjacket. Before you can break the rules, however, you must learn them, and the thoroughly trained writer is one who has not skipped over the fundamentals. The journalism school faculty should make certain such is not possible.

A major serious handicap of the journalism teacher who wants to serve his students best is inadequate contact with them. Whereas the music teacher, football coach, dramatic director and others who train students for skills, are able to work with them continuously for months

or years, the journalism teacher may have a student in only one, two or three courses which may not be consecutive nor even closely related in purpose and subject matter. The teacher unable to spend weeks or months becoming acquainted with a student's individual needs and then the rest of the year, or years, providing close attention to those strengths and weaknesses, is not providing maximum benefits. Large class sizes are partly responsible for the failure of the journalism teacher and student to become better acquainted. Failure of curriculum builders and administrators who schedule and make class assignments are a larger factor in that they do not give proper weight to the importance of continuity and close acquaintance.

As a department within a liberal arts college, journalism suffers in many ways. First of all there is the basic assumption that the purpose is not different from that of all other departments and relates to good citizenship or personality and/or character or mental development or whatever the institution's overall purposes are supposed to be. The professional goal is not recognized as paramount or at best it is overlooked. As a result journalism students take required courses to merit graduation that are the same as those for majors in other departments. This takes precious time and creates an attitude among journalism administrators that they are performing well if they reduce the journalism courses and requirements to a minimum. It is faulty reasoning. What should be reduced are the liberal arts requirements. For example, when Kenneth Olson and his advisors were trying to devise a curriculum that would emphasize adequate journalism training correlated with the major social sciences while at the same time providing a world overview, they recognized that something would have to give. Among

the traditional requirements that they eliminate were for foreign languages. At the time they had the example of the military authorities and crash courses in even esoteric dialects. Foreign languages can be learned and remembered if they are used; otherwise, the time spent on them, especially dead languages, throughout high school and college is not so productive as other courses more pragmatically related to the contemporary scene.

Too often journalism students suffer in first courses in fields other than their own. Required to take A courses in economics, sociology and political science, for instance, they come back screaming to their advisors seeking relief from further punishment. This is so because the general educational courses of a generation ago have virtually disappeared. In grandfather's day it was possible to take overview year courses in the fields mentioned and others so as to obtain a general laymen's understanding of the importance of those fields in his life. Today the beginning courses in these so-called disciplines are mainly intended for students who expect to become majors and are to familiarize them with the vocabulary and gadgetry of the fields. To cover the topics included in the courses of yore, it now is necessary to take two or three advanced courses and, of course, acquire more detailed knowledge than necessary for journalism.

Journalism, as a part of the liberal arts, also suffers because of the post-World War II trend toward quantification and avoidance of value judgments in the social sciences. Psychological and other types of testing have been the increasing rage in educational circles for more than a half century. Today hope for reform is rising as black

parents, tired of having their children put in dummy classes, are revolting against the labeling and tracking of most metropolitan public school children. The system amounts to giving a child a number very early in his educational career, in first grade perhaps, and assigning him to classes on the basis of the first test result and never changing it all the way through the high school. College aptitude tests determine what colleges modern students can attend or whether they go to college at all. Only recently has there developed a reaction against reliance on such tests and against the fundamental concept of intelligence which can be tested. Certainly no tests have as yet been devised to evaluate the qualities which make for success in journalism: inquisitiveness, ingenuity, imagination, orginality, creativity, perseverence and the like. Investigation of college board tests and journalism school records shows surprisingly negative correlations. A lot of bright kids whose high school English literature teachers were impressed by their themes on Lady Macbeth or Shylock have been dismal failures in journalism schools. On the other hand many of the prize winning journalism students just squeaked through traditional courses in which it was required that students memorize textbooks and regurgitate their contents onto examination papers.

You just cannot test the extent to which a student possesses the qualities essential for success in this field except by performance. Attempts to predict reportorial competence on the basis of personality traits are likewise futile. The class wallflower altogether too often comes back with stories which indicate thorough and accurate perceptive fact gathering, whereas the class extrovert flops on the assignment when outside of the eye range of his instructor.

It is impossible to teach anyone how to report by the lecture method. Most valuable to a newsgatherer is development of an attitude which traditionally has been called the nose for news. This hackneyed term means a keen "smell a rat" viewpoint, sharpness in detecting angles of news stories and mental agility to resort to alternative approaches to the truth when blocked initially. An experienced reporter knows that there is always more than one way to get a story, with few exceptions. He must know who and what the alternatives are, for which his general academic training is helpful. However, a nonperceptive person can memorize all of the agencies, public and private, in a particular field and know the names of all the important leaders and still be inadequate to the assignment of digging out a story. It's not the spark of genius he lacks but the drill which comes from hard boiled teachers and deskmen who know the answers themselves. Only a previously sharp journalist can be a sharp journalism teacher.

To be a good interviewer one must know the person to be interviewed and the subject about which questions are to be asked. The successful interviewer also is somewhat of a pragmatic psychologist able to adjust himself to the personality of the interviewee. The reporter is like a cross examining lawyer who fits his technique--softness or aggressiveness--to the situation. The sharp lawyer who has thoroughly prepared for the case recognizes when opportunities to impeach a witness present themselves. A less well prepared lawyer fails to recognize such opportunities. Exactly the same sort of thing is true of journalistic interviewing.

Obviously you can't teach the qualities necessary for successful interviewing by assigning textbook reading or by lecturing. You've got to demonstrate how it should be done by class exercises. The mimeographed scrambled facts technique is all right in the very early weeks of a news writing course, but very soon the student should be required to drag out the facts of a theoretical class exercise by interviewing the instructor and his aides who impersonate news sources. When the time comes for live interviewing, the instructor must be there to observe and comment afterward. As the student's training progresses he increasingly goes out on his own and his performance is judged by the results, meaning his stories which the instructor evaluates as does a city editor.

In the interim between the staged class interview and the individual assignment, there must be observed practice. Let the whole class look on while a chief interviewer takes on the celebrity. Advance preparation is, of course, essential; and it is valuable if the chief interviewer tells his classmates, possibly a class period in advance, what stories he is seeking and what line of questioning he will pursue. Opportunity for other members of the class to question the interviewee can be afforded after the chief interviewer has exhausted himself. The instructor enters into the interview only when necessary to prevent disaster. He is there to judge the performances of the students and he gives his critiques at the earliest possible moment thereafter. "When Mr. X said that, you should have been smart enough to follow up with this," he says. Or he provides some background information

that the interviewer overlooked or which he mishandled. The teacher acts as an athletic or dramatic coach. It is a time consuming technique but there is hardly any other way.

Writing of the account, following the interview, should be preceded by class discussion of lead possibilities, suggestions of additional research which would enhance the account's value, organization of the piece, followups and other related aspects of the total experience. All members of the class should be taxed to recognize important angles and relationships between bits of information given out at various intervals during the session. No two reporters, student or professional, will handle any assignment in identical fashion. Let the most ingenious and imaginative win. Genius, however, is much more perspiration than inspiration, and nobody ever became a great writer except after a lot of practice, practice, practice.

Obviously the first requisite of a journalism teacher is to be able to outperform his students in some important aspects. He does not necessarily have to be a retired Pulitzer prize winner, as many of them are unable to instruct others in how to emulate themselves. There are plenty of successful sports managers and coaches who were not star players, and there are dramatics and musical teachers whose names never appeared in lights. Teaching requires some qualifications different from performance, but a minimum of practical experience is essential. One just can't teach another to do something that he himself has not tried, even though he was not very good at it. The successful journalism teacher knows what he wants his students to become. He envisions the goal of competent performers and he devotes his zeal to

progressive development of skills and attitudes on the part of his tuition-paying charges.

The five year minimum of professional experience which the American Council on Education for Journalism insisted upon for years should be restored if journalism schools are to continue to be journalism schools.

The successful teacher shares vicariously in the achievements of former students. The teacher's ego is boosted by knowledge of those achievements for which the old prof takes perhaps more credit than he usually deserves. Teacher pride in the finished product--the boys and girls with whom he struggled in class--cannot and should not be discouraged. In any field good teaching means teachers who care. Have enough of them and you can neglect all else.